

# THE CEA CRITIC

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Engel ✓

## On Attitudes Toward Language Study

In teaching courses in freshman composition, advanced grammar for incipient teachers of composition, and graduate courses in linguistics, I have been impressed by the aversion so many students have to studying language as such. How long would classes in grammar and linguistics survive if they had to compete on equal terms with Shakespeare and T. S. Eliot? In various moods we teachers are inclined to blame ourselves, our methods, the high schools, or the students. Yet none of these is the real culprit. The reason for aversion to language study lies in the nature of language itself. And so, perhaps, in the nature of language we can find a remedy.

As teachers of English and lovers of literature, we are inclined to prize the mastery of language as an end in itself. We learnedly discourse on structure and usage; we lovingly ponder rhythms and nuances. We have constantly to guard ourselves against mistaking facility for erudition, and against taking too seriously the shibboleths society has erected to distinguish the language of the aristocracy from that of the masses. There are not wanting philosophers to encourage us in our pleasant fancies by insisting that among savages, and in its poetic and artistic aspects, language is a means of self-realization, the key by which man has opened the door upon the universe.<sup>1</sup>

Yet we know that for most of our students, as for the great body of "normal" people, the artistic and philosophic aspects of language have no meaning. One of the principal aims of all our instruction is, I take it, to make our students aware of these aspects. But we realize that in spite of our best efforts language is, and will remain, for most of them merely a tool for communication. As such, it shares with other tools the characteristic of being used most efficiently when it is used most nearly automatically. This simple fact lies at the root of our students' dislike for language study.

\* \* \* \*

As a tool, language is not an end in itself, but only a means to an end. The end is the communication of "ideas," be they simply physical needs like "Give me a drink," or more abstract concepts such as "Temperance is the best

## ANNUAL CEA MEETING

Wednesday 6 p.m. December 27, 1950

Holland House Taverne

10 Rockefeller Plaza      Rockefeller Center

48th and 49th Street      New York City

(Direct subway connections from Hotel Statler)

Dinner (informal): \$3.50 (and 15% service charge)

### PROGRAM

"An Invasion of Privacy"

Robert T. Fitzhugh (Brooklyn)

"The Quick and the Dead"

Albert Guérard (Brandeis)

"Revision of Ph.D. Curriculum"

W. L. Werner (Penn. State)

"Revision of Teaching Load"

Amanda Ellis (Colorado College)

Presiding: W. W. Watt (Lafayette)

polishy." The tool itself may be to break them down into syllables, gesture, speech, or writing.<sup>2</sup> Only as we come to use any one of these three mediums automatically can we communicate easily and quickly.

During the war I taught Morse code from records to Naval air cadets — an exercise calculated to lead any language teacher to meditate upon his sins. As I watched the platters spin, I had ample opportunity to note the mechanical aspects of communication. The skill of the students increased in direct proportion as they became less and less aware of individual dits and daas. Most of them learned to recognize simple words without having to break them down into letters, and the few prodigies who reached twenty or twenty-five words a minute had begun to be able to recognize familiar word groups without having

Like codes, then, speech and writing serve the purpose best when we think least about them.

When we are forced to concentrate on the mediums themselves, as we are in any sort of language study, we tend to lose sight of the meaning.<sup>3</sup> For instance, one may have a large vocabulary of German words and a sound knowledge of German grammar yet be utterly incapable of following a conversation. Because he is forced to concentrate on each word and inflection, he loses track of the meaning. When he no longer needs to concentrate on these details, we say that he can "think" in German. Like the speaker, the reader concentrates on the ideas rather than on the medium.

Only children and beginners lip read, while mature readers apprehend meaning directly from the

printed symbols.<sup>4</sup> Anyone who has tried knows that it is almost impossible to read for sense while reading proof, and that one of the most accurate ways to read proof is to read the text backwards so as to make it impossible for the eyes to read into a group of letters what the mind knows should be there.

Before they ever chanted syllables in the first grade, our students had begun to master the tool of speech. From childhood on, their training in practical communication has been largely extracurricular. They feel that they can eat and drink, work and play, love and marry all without benefit of the grammar book or English teacher. But the English teacher will not leave them alone. It is significant that the one subject in grammar school, high school, and college that is uniformly and everlasting remedial is English. English classes as they are usually conducted belong in the curriculum of Sunday school.

The forcible tampering with habitual language patterns that goes on in English classes, quite aside from the havoc it plays with the student's psyche, arouses his resentment because it interferes with communication. It is obvious that if the most efficient communication is that which is most nearly automatic, then anything which prevents the verbal response from being automatic, anything which makes for verbal indecision on the part of either the speaker or the hearer, is annoying. Such indecision breaks the train of thought and forces the parties to concentrate on the imperfect medium. I believe that this is the basis for the average person's dislike for poetry. The poet abhors the smooth and well-worn channel. He insists on wrenching language to serve his own private ends. Such abnormal behavior can but annoy the ordinary individual who knows language only in its social aspects as a tool for communication.

The effect upon the development of language of this abhorrence of indecision could be illustrated almost endlessly, since it is a major factor in linguistic change. For instance, take the treatment of synonyms. In spite of its richness, our vocabulary will not tolerate exact synonyms. Either one of the words alters its meaning, or one

Continued on page 5

## ANNUAL DINNER RESERVATION

(Please fill in and return this blank to Mrs. Leone Barron, Treasurer, College English Association, 11 Old Chapel, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass.)

Please reserve ..... place(s), in my name, for the CEA dinner, Holland House Taverne, Wednesday, Dec. 27, 6 p.m.

Enclosed you will find a remittance of (\$4.00 a plate) \$.....

Name .....

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Address .....

## THE CEA CRITIC

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## THE POTSHEARD'S CALENDAR

May

## Argument

In this AEglogue is set forth a delectable controversy made in imitation of that it Theocritus, whereto also Spenser fashioned his August AEglogue. Perigot. It fell upon an eight o'clock, Willye. hey ho the dawn grey, Per. When sleepie teachers wont to mocke: Wil. now gynneth this roundelay. Per. Sprawling in the classeroome, Wil. hey ho the harde seats, Per. The while the classe did doze and swoon, Wil. while the student's selfe read Keats, Per. The lecturer with manner grande, Wil. hey ho the classe bell, Per. Stryding to the lecture stande, Wil. he can stryde it very well: Per. Well decked in a Harris tweed, Wil. hey ho baggy tweed, Per. And red tie in bow discrete, Wil. red is for professors mee: Per. A briefcase in his hand he bore, Wil. hey ho the briefe case. Per. Of endless notes therin was store, Wil. he as briefe as all his race.

Per. The classe did leave their wonted doze, Wil. hey ho seely classe, Per. Pretending to be on their toes, Wil. every student, ladde and lasse. Per. The lecturer beganne with sigh,

Wil. hey ho the discourse, Per. Fixing them with mistie eye, Wil. thinking of another course: Per. All as fleuressent light aloof, Wil. hey ho the blue glowe, Per. Filters down from dingy roofe, Wil. so into head does knowlege goe. Per. Or as the terme bell rends the eare, Wil. hey ho the jangle, Per. At ende of drowsie classeroome hour, Wil. so unknots the poet's tangle. Per. Begynneth he to explicate, Wil. hey ho the submeaning, Per. The sub-intent in triplicate, Wil. fruit of footnote gleaning: Per. Seek ye now for structure there?

Wil. hey ho the structure,

Per. Here are girders and to spare,

Wil. pray but feel the texture.

Per. Images leape out everywhere,

Wil. hey ho the mixture,

Per. Note the symbol of the stair,

Wil. ascent in poems a fixture:

## Preview of Annual Meeting

The Holland House Taverne is affiliated with the Netherlands Club. We have been assured warm hospitality—and a delicious dinner, to begin at 6 p.m. (Informal)

A varied, lively, and timely program has been arranged. In his presidential address, Robert T. Fitzhugh will discourse, with wit and wisdom, on his fresh approach to comedy.

Professor Albert Guérard will then launch a searching discussion of the implications, for students and teachers of English, of the current emphasis on comparative literature, world literature, the classics in translation, humanities courses, and the like.

What does this emphasis mean for our undergraduate courses in composition and literature (English and American)? For our graduate curricula? For those seeking jobs in "English"? For us already practising as "English teachers"? For English and American writers?

Is this trend all to the good? Is it a mixed blessing? May it prove more harmful than beneficial?

These are some of the questions to which we will be invited to direct our attention and to offer our answers. We may count on Professor Guérard to present the problem both incisively and comprehensively; to put the issues trenchantly; and to draw us out.

In addition, we are to have a statement from Professor W. L. Werner, Chairman of our Committee on Revision of Ph.D. Curriculum; and one from Professor Amanda Ellis, Chairman of our Committee on Teaching Load (of teachers of English in the high schools). Miss Ellis will recommend ways in which, as college teachers of English, we may show our concern for equitable adjustment of load among our colleagues in the secondary schools.

Professor W. W. Watt, contributor of humorous and satiric verse to *THE NEW YORKER* and other magazines, will preside.

We hope you will come and bring your friends.

RESERVATIONS: If you do intend to come to the dinner, be sure to fill out and return the reservation blank provided at the bottom of Page 1 in this issue.

CEA HEADQUARTERS will be maintained, from December 26 through December 29, at the Hotel Statler, New York. Feel free to stop in for relaxation and talk. You will be most welcome.

Per. Not unlike T. S. Eliot,

Wil. hey ho Eliot,

Per. Sicklied o'er with palest thought,

Wil. constructing his informing plot.

Per. Feel the empathetic tugge,

Wil. hey ho empathy,

Per. Of nightingale's most woeful "jug,"

Wil. true aesthetic sympathy:

Per. The metaphor in full control,

Wil. hey ho the mythos,

Per. Poet, fill the golden bowl,

Wil. and let us sup on pathos.

Per. We see the poet's Weltanschauung,

Wil. hey ho the world-view,

Per. The climate of opinion wrong,

Wil. high humidity was due:

Per. Dichotomy is here suggested,

Wil. hey ho dichotomy,

Per. The mythe is there yet undigested,

Wil. wot we well mythology.

Per. Note the poem's mode of being,

Wil. hey ho the strata,

Per. And the seven types of seeing

Wil. bothe stain and the stigma,

Per. Ambiguity is rife,

Wil. hey ho the paradox,

Per. Thus the poet reads from life,

Wil. fitting keys, unlocking locks.

Per. So learned we on Monday

morne.

Wil. hey ho the bright daye,

Per. From intellect with rim of horne,

Wil. Now endeth our roundelay.

Bruce Dearing  
Swarthmore College

## NEW . . .

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## I've Been Reading

J. GORDON EAKER  
Literary Editor

THE BACKGROUND OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS by Karl J. Holzknecht (American Book Company, 482 pp., \$4.75)—If, as Kittredge said, it is impossible at this late date to think our own thoughts about Shakespeare, Professor Holzknecht now helps us to rethink most of the best that has been thought about Shakespeare's art and what lies behind it. Aspiring modestly to write "simply a factual and an imaginative guide on a great adventure," the author has actually summarized an amazing amount of scholarship on Shakespeare's life, his England, the companies, playhouse, and audience, on general aspects of his art, and on his theory of comedy, history, and tragedy. Final chapters cover "Shakespeare in Print," "Shakespeare's Reputation," and "Shakespeare on the Stage." The 32-page collection of Shakespearean scenes and characters is probably unique and is typical of the painstaking work that has gone into this volume. Best of all, the book is written and sets a high example of scholarship in its thoroughness, judgment, readability, and clarity.

Dante or Joel Barlow? — "English" or "Literature"? — Drew Pearson was once sponsored by a hat concern, with the motto: "Don't take less than the best!" — Of what relevance to college English teachers? Come to the Annual Meeting to find out from Albert Guérard — or to tell us.

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Freshman English  
and 1954

When Warner Taylor of the University of Wisconsin compiled his national survey of conditions in Freshman English twenty years ago, he found that nearly half our institutions combined the study of literature with the study of rhetoric. He concluded that the teaching of pure literature in Freshman English courses would grow steadily.<sup>1</sup> If it has grown steadily, I suggest that we have been on the wrong track. I believe that the last twenty years have supplied us with cogent reasons for devoting all of our time in Freshman English to the non-literary aspects of written communication and for relegating the study of pure literature to other courses.

The fundamental nature of the problem that ought to replace the study of literature in our Freshman English courses has been brilliantly delineated in George Orwell's recent novel, *Nineteen Eighty-four*. In that novel Orwell sees the world organized a generation from now into three great dictatorships each with the same kind of regimented internal structure, each dependent for its existence on continuous warfare. Two, but not always the same two, of the dictatorships are always at war with the third. The continuous war serves the purpose of consuming surplus production and maintaining a blind, frenzied patriotism in the populations. Each country is governed by four ministries — the Ministry of Plenty, charged with maintaining artificial scarcity; the Ministry of Peace, which wages war; the Ministry of Love, responsible for enforcing the law; and the Ministry of Truth, which disseminates the lies that must be believed if the government is to survive.

The protagonist of the novel labors in the Ministry of Truth. His job is to help adapt all previously published records to the government's policy of the moment. If the government changes its ally in the continuous war, all favorable references in newspapers, magazines, books to the former ally — now the enemy — must be changed to unfavorable. New editions are printed and the old copies destroyed. History, in other words, is systematically reinterpreted to fit the mood of the moment. A second division of the Ministry of Truth devotes itself to the production of pornography and pseudo-educational manuals for the diversion of the masses. A third division devotes itself to the development of Newspeak, a language so limited in vocabulary and connotations that subversive thought will

become impossible because no words will exist in which to express it.

Now this is a novel, and I do not propose that we accept it as a necessarily accurate chart of the future. But the culminations it depicts are quite obvious extensions of forces already at work. Russia's "Ministry of Truth" has rewritten biological science to accord with party theory and has claimed as her own most of the mechanical inventions of Europe and America. General Eisenhower in his *Crusade in Europe* mentions the distorted motion picture version of the German surrender that he saw in Moscow.<sup>2</sup> The Russians, like Hitler, define truth as simply uncontradicted assertion.

Arnold Toynbee in *A Study of History* points out that universal education has encountered a number of stumbling-blocks in its attempt to facilitate the triumph of justice and enlightenment. The greatest of these stumbling-blocks is the susceptibility of the newly educated to exploitation through the media of communication. He points out that the Yellow Press was invented in England almost exactly twenty years after the passage of the universal elementary education act of 1870 — as soon, that is, as the first generation of children from the national schools had acquired sufficient purchasing power to yield a profit to irresponsible press-lords. The next step was taken when modern dictators deposed the press-lords and substituted for crude and debased private entertainment an equally crude and debased system of state propaganda. In Toynbee's words,

The elaborate and ingenious machinery for the mass-enslavement of semi-educated minds, invented for private profit under British and American régimes of *laissez faire*, has been simply taken over by the rulers of states who have employed these mental appliances, reinforced by the cinema and the radio, for their own sinister purposes. . . . Thus, in countries where democratic education has been introduced, the people are in danger of falling under an intellectual tyranny engineered either by private exploitation or by public authority. If the people's souls are to be saved, the only way is to raise the standard of mass-education to a degree at which its recipients will be rendered immune against at any rate the grosser forms of exploitation and propaganda; and it need hardly be said that this is no easy task.<sup>3</sup>

To render our students immune "against at any rate the grosser forms of exploitation and propaganda," to give them the weapons to fight "intellectual tyranny" — that, I believe, is a legitimate and imperative objective of Freshman English courses. The concurrence in recognizing the problems of an artist like Orwell, of a man of ac-

tion like Eisenhower, and of a thinker like Toynbee should encourage us to devote our time to its solution. Nowhere else in the college curriculum can the problem be so effectively tackled as in the Freshman English course. Thoroughly drilled in the technique of symbol-analysis, in the detection of false logic and glib abstraction, the alert student will never again read or write in quite the same old way. His writing will take on a conscious precision and coordination. His writing will become what it ought to be — a search for meaning.

Too long have we in our composition courses limited ourselves to the study of language as a device for honest communication. Our books of readings have provided examples of writers saying important things nobly and well, and we have urged our students to emulate them. But language can camouflage as well as reveal; and if we do not teach our students that and teach them how to tell the difference, we are not preparing them to assume the risks that accompany the responsibilities guaranteed by the First Amendment.

1. A National Survey of Conditions in Freshman English (Madison: Wisconsin University of Wisconsin Bureau of Educational Research Bulletin, No. 11, May, 1929), pp. 12, 29.

2. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1948), p. 423.

3. Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (New York and London: Oxford Press, 1947), p. 293.

James Paul Stokes  
Florida State University

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**The Problem of Reading**

A supersonic and practical age such as ours can be relied upon to give serious attention to those aspects of reading which it considers important: namely, speed and comprehension. It is the well-informed person who knows how to get things done; it is the well-informed voter who makes the good citizen.

So far as I know, no one has opposed a fuller comprehension by the student of what he reads, but several have spoken out against the modern emphasis on greater speed in reading. Most of these dissidents are, or have been, themselves teachers.

For example, Mr. Arlo Bates in his *Talks on the Study of Literature* says: "The rage for swiftness which is so characteristic of this restless time has been extended to fashions of reading. By some sort of a vicious perversion, the old saw that he who runs may read seems to have been transposed to 'He who reads must run.' . . . Intellectual assimilation takes time. The mind is not to be enriched as a coal barge is loaded."

In his article "How to Mark a Book," which appeared in the July 6, 1941 issue of *The Saturday Review of Literature*, Mr. Mortimer J. Alder remarks: ". . . you may say that this business of marking books is going to slow up your reading. It probably will. That's one of the reasons for doing it. Most of us have been taken in by the notion that speed of reading is a measure of our intelligence . . . The sign of intelligence in reading is the ability to read different things differently according to their

available Jan., 1951

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worth. In the case of good books, the point is not to see how many of them you can get through, but rather how many can get through you — how many you can make your own. A few friends are better than a thousand acquaintances."

Again, Professor George F. Reynolds in a recent article in *College English* (January, 1950) in which he urges the acceptance of oral interpretation as a field for graduate work in English, writes: ". . . the American educational program for the last fifty years has increasingly emphasized rapid silent reading from the grades up. Until this emphasis is changed, there is little hope of teaching the majority of students to read aloud effectively for themselves."

A moment's reflection, though, shows us that these three gentlemen are not thinking primarily of informative writing. They are thinking of imaginative writing, De Quincey's "literature of power." As we move from informative writing to imaginative writing, the importance of speed of reading decreases rapidly, the importance of assimilation increases correspondingly, and the importance of comprehension remains a constant.

As might be expected, our schools and colleges have concentrated upon informative writing, the "literature of knowledge." In matters of speed and comprehension we can obtain results that are immediately measurable, particularly in speed. But in dealing with even this type of literature teachers have lessened their chances of success by acquiescing in the banishment of grammar.

No good writer, even in the most purely informative writing, likes to cast every sentence in the same word-order pattern. But let him write a sentence that deviates much from the standard pattern, and that sentence stands a better than even chance of baffling the student who has no knowledge of functional grammar. Even a relatively slight transposition of elements, intended merely to furnish a little variety in style, will sometimes defeat such a student.

As an example let me cite this sentence found in a collection of readings used by my Advanced Composition class: "As important as the game was the formal dinner which followed it." There was (properly) no comma after game; the student had to perceive the grammatical relationships before he knew to pause at that point. One student of average ability and of more than average persistence and courage told me that he had gone over the sentence at least a dozen times but had been unable to get its meaning until he heard me read it.

Virginia Woolf somewhere pleads for an open mind in our approach to a piece of literature. Our prejudices even get in the way of our reading what has been set down on the page. A common fault of the poor reader is to substitute what he wants to read for what is actually in front of him.

Students sometimes have what amounts to mental blind spots which a teacher cannot easily detect. I have known students who were consistently baffled by the figure of speech called by rhetoricians *litotes*, that figure in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of its contrary (as in *He had no low opinion of his own powers or Her loneliness was not unmixed with fear*). Rhetoric, like grammar, has lost favor in our schools. In fact, it seems that the arts of which the M.A. is supposed to be master, grammar, rhetoric, and logic, are often unknown to him.

What can a teacher do to detect and remedy substitution of words, mental blind spots, failure to fathom syntactical relationships? He may be able to obtain some aid from the simple device of having students occasionally read passages aloud in class. False emphases will reveal at once a lack of understanding and may help the teacher perceive why the student reads so poorly.

The reading aloud by the teacher of more difficult pieces or passages can be extremely helpful in bringing out essential points, in revealing thought relationships, changes in mood, ironical implications — much that escapes the inexpert reader. The student can by this means be brought to realize that in a piece of literature much of the power resides in the way a thing is said (as in those lines "Light thickens, and the crow makes wing to the rooky wood"). It is often no less true in prose that the very sound and movement of the words becomes an integral part of the meaning (as in ". . . whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised."

Basic to the art of reading is a knowledge of words and their ways. A good teacher can do much to quicken in the student an intelligent curiosity about words and the ways in which they are used. A comment upon the origin or history of a word (such as *tantalize* or *humor*) will often make the word more vivid or help clarify its present meaning, particularly if it presents an abstraction. On the other hand, a few illustrations of how meanings evolve and change should

put the student on his guard against the notion that etymology is a safe guide to present meaning.

Teachers could also perform a real service if they would put a premium upon textbooks which avoid wordiness. Generally speaking, writers of textbooks are so prolix and repetitious that a student must read on the lobe to get over his assignments.

In a bibliography put out by the State University of Iowa I find listed a compilation entitled *Books for Youths Who Dislike Reading*. Presumably the books here referred to are intended to help a youth overcome his dislike for reading, rather than confirm him in it. They will need to do their work well if the youth is not to suffer a relapse when he sits down with some college textbooks. Though he may weather the relapse, temporarily, he is not likely to read much when he gets out of college and no longer has to — unless he has been fired by a great novel, play, or poem.

The great literature is still with us — and in a relatively small compass. But the literature of power must be read slowly and thoughtfully. And it always will be, by a few. For the art of reading depends ultimately upon the intelligence and experience of the reader. Upon this experience the teacher may hope to set some happy mark.

Allen B. Kellogg  
Indiana Central College

The current national CEA Nominating Committee consists of the following: Balfour Daniels (Houston); Irving Churchill (Coe), and Alvan Ryan (Brattleboro), Chairman.

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## On Attitudes Toward . . .

*Continued from page 1*

disappears. There were in old English two words for dog, *dogga* and *hund*. Trying to decide between these two terms would cause the momentary indecision of which we have been speaking, and so one of the two had to change its meaning or disappear. In this case, *hound* took on a more specialized meaning (although its cognate in German did not).

The same sort of semantic shift has occurred when an English word has persisted alongside a borrowed synonym: *shirt* from Old English and *skirt* from Scandinavian came to designate different items of apparel; *shoot* (Old English) and *scoot* (Scandinavian) different kinds of motion. Similarly *lord* (Old English) and *sire* (French), *loving* (Old English) and *amorous* (French), and *work* (Old English) and *labor* (French) have taken on different shades of meaning. Where the denotation is not actually different, the words have become associated with different levels of diction (*house*—*domicile*; *sissy*—*effeminate*) so that in a given situation there is no uncertainty as to what word should be used.

\* \* \*

Historically, one of the principal reasons for the development of the "rules" of grammar and usage has been the desire to eliminate indecision in the choosing and ordering of our words. Freedom from the handbook in the golden age of Elizabethan literature may have benefited such giants as Shakespeare and Milton, but the plight of the ordinary person is illustrated by the grotesque ambiguities of Henry Machyn, the diarist, and

appears even in the awkwardness of some of Queen Elizabeth's own correspondence. As learning began to spread to the middle class in both England and America, a cry went up for "ascertainment," as it was then called. Should Samuel Truelove say different from or different to? Should Priscilla Prettybones say I will do it or I shall do it?

It was to solve problems such as these that the Johnsons and Lowths and Fowlers and Pooleys came into existence. And it would seem that their rules do improve the efficiency of communication; but here arises the question of the true relation between written and spoken language. The eighteenth century has no doubt been to clarify and regularize the formal, written language. However, this regularization has been accompanied by an increasing dichotomy between the spoken and written language. Since a person's speaking habits have established reasonably consistent patterns in conformity with those of his associates before he comes in contact with the written language, he does not need rules and drill to eliminate indecision in everyday communication. Trying to superimpose the formal rules upon his natural speech only confuses him.<sup>5</sup> So to the student, the study of grammar and usage appears actually to be an impediment to free communication.

Now there may be justification for trying to make all young people learn the formal written language. Certainly as long as certain spellings and usages are marks of social or intellectual aristocracy, as they have been at least since the dawn of recorded history, a democratic society is likely to demand that composition classes continue to teach a standard usage. But this does not mean that the students will ever enjoy the process. New techniques and devices may help, but they cannot be expected to make language study a delight. Only an intelligent and well-prepared instructor who understands the dubious character of his authority and who is willing to discuss usage rather than pronounce upon it can make it more than tolerable.

On the advanced and graduate level the problem is somewhat different. Older students come to courses in linguistics after long conditioning in remedial grammar. Their natural aversion to probing the language they use has been strengthened by years of correction and drill. Most of them are ripe for a good-natured exposé

of the chicanery of prescriptive grammar in general. Furthermore, the idea of language study on a historical or philosophical basis is for many of them the seed of a new idea which may make some of them actually like the material. That is, it may make them like the material if it is properly cultivated. Too often it is not. I should be the last to deny the values of phonology, morphology, syntax, and comparative grammar, but these are, after all, only part, and the most abstract part, of what there is to know about language. Yet to devote much time to semantics, to the psychological and sociological sides of language, or to its literary and philosophic implications in a course in linguistics is cheating — popularizing. If it ever came to either — or, which fortunately there is no need for it ever to do, a case could certainly be made for the greater usefulness of a knowledge of how the vocabulary has developed and the effects of the Renaissance upon the language than of the great vowel shift and Middle English dialects. We teachers of linguistics have not been doing justice to the cultural aspects of our subject, the aspects in which our students are, quite rightly, the most interested. The very nature of language makes it hard enough for us to get our students to study the language itself; certainly we should not forget the assistance of this our greatest ally.

1. Two interesting studies in this vein are Ernst Cassirer's *Language and Myth*, trans. Susanne K. Langer (Harcourt, 1946), and Miss Langer's own *Philosophy in a New Key* (Harvard Press, 1942; Pelican Books edition, 1948).

2. For fuller discussion of this "mechanistic" view of language see Leonard Bloomfield's *Language* (Henry Holt, 1933), esp. Chap. II.

3. After we have begun discussing archaic, dialectal, or other variant pronunciations in a course, I invariably have students tell me that their newly acquired awareness of pronunciation is annoying and sometimes actually causes them to lose track of the meaning.

4. For some interesting comments on the mechanical aspects of reading and the way in which they discourage the adoption of simplified spelling, see Henry Bradley's *On the Relations Between Spoken and Written English* (Oxford Press, 1919).

5. For general discussion of the futility of teaching formal grammar and references to studies showing that in some cases errors actually increase in number and proportion in the later grades, see the last chapter of C. G. Fries' *American English Grammar* (Appleton-Century, 1948), esp. p. 284, note 5. The program that Fries outlines in this chapter is in line with the positive approach suggested below.

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**Cross's Marmoreal Image**

Few books have been awaited more eagerly than Cross's *Life of George Eliot*, but when it was published in 1885 many readers felt disappointed. Eliza Lynn Linton complained that "more is omitted than is told. . . . The book has been written to embalm and preserve the image of the Ideal George Eliot as success made her appear and as the world accepted for reality." It was unthinkable that the bereaved husband should have done anything else. "No single letter is printed entire from the beginning to the end," he wrote in the preface.

Mr. Cross had known George Eliot only during the last decade of her life. She and Lewes used to visit her mother, who was about George Eliot's age. Mrs. Cross died just a week after Lewes, and George Eliot and Cross were drawn together by sympathy as well as business affairs. Within a few months they were reading Dante together, and a year and a half after Lewes's death they were married. George Eliot always required someone to lean upon, and her marriage to Mr. Cross was only the final instance of this dependence.

There is evidence to suggest that she was planning some sort of autobiography. About 150 pages of Cross's *Life* consist of passages that she left ready for printing, for the most part expanded from her Journals. Long before she grew famous George Eliot knew that friends were preserving her letters. Though she spoke of her repugnance to the idea of their falling into other hands, she did not demand that her friends destroy them. If Lewes had survived her, he would probably have written her biography, which was undertaken soon after her death by Mr. Cross. "I think that you are the right person to write her biography," wrote George Eliot's brother, "and I hope no one else will attempt it."

Cross was not a man of letters, and it is surprising that his book was not worse than it is. He welcomed advice of his friends. Charles Lewes, who had the deepest affection for his step-mother, helped at every stage, and Lord Acton volunteered to read the whole manuscript and review it at the moment of publication. He read all the proofs and corrected scores of errors. Even with such assistance Cross was no Boswell. He cared little for accuracy of details. Exact dating seemed to him unimportant, and he did not hesitate to transpose passages or run together parts of entirely different

letters. Having known George Eliot only in her sibylline years, he sought out the sententious and excluded the spontaneous and humorous remarks. When she exclaims over some misplaced proofs, "I would rather have lost one of my toes," Cross silently changed toes to fingers!

Herbert Spencer was one of her contemporaries who refused to allow his letters to be used. He was peculiarly concerned about the *Life*, however. Soon after her death he had learned of a general belief among his friends that he had once been engaged to George Eliot only to be jilted when Lewes came upon the scene, and he asked Cross to insert a note contradicting the rumor and even sent him the text of it. Cross felt that it would cause more gossip than it allayed; the passage to which Spencer wanted his note attached seemed clear enough without comment: "We have agreed that we are not in love with each other and that there is no reason why we should not have as much of each other's society as we like. Spencer revised his note, but Mr. Cross found the second version also unacceptable, and proposed one of his own. "Much better no note at all than the one you propose," Spencer replied. So Cross took him at his word. He omitted the note and deleted from George Eliot's letter the words "that we are not in love with each other." It was a last minute change, made after the proof sheets had gone off to Harper's so that the American issue of the *Life* includes the whole sentence.

Though all the entries made before she went abroad with Lewes in 1854 have been torn out of George Eliot's Journal, a few stray passages quoted in the *Life* prove that they were intact at the time Cross was writing. Charles Lewes, her literary executor, doubtless approved of the destruction, for all of his father's early Journals have also disappeared.

Cross lived on until 1924, when George Eliot's reputation had sunk to its lowest ebb. His book had created a marmoreal image that could never have conceived of Mrs. Poyser of Mr. Brooks or the Pullets and Gleggs. The legend of lofty seriousness fostered in the beginning by Lewes became through Cross's efforts so firmly fixed that it colored her reputation as a novelist. An accurate edition of her letters will dispel some of the cloud of weary gravity that has overshadowed her, and at the same time confirm the profound moral view of life in which critics are once more finding her claim to be called the greatest novelist in

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